**DEBATE**

**“ROBBER BARONS?”**

**Or**

**“CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY?”**

OBJECTIVES:

Students will explore the view that the industrial leaders of the late 1800s and early 1900s were admirable men and heroic builders of a new social order.

Students will explore alternative images of the industrial leaders of the late 1800s and early 1900s in which these men were seen as predatory, exploitative, and responsible for the central evils of the day.

Students will understand why the inventor-entrepreneur came to be seen as a kind of hero in those years.

Students will understand why the industrial leaders of the late 1800 and 1900s came to be seen as exploitive, and determined to expand control of industry during a time of growing racial prejudice and economic uncertainty.

Students will explore alternative images of industrial images of the late 1800s and early 1900s in which these men were seen as predatory

**INTRODCUTION**

There are many aspects and sides to the Industrial Revolution that students have explored.  Dynamic changes took place during which America reinvented itself and emerged as an industrial power.  During this revolution there were the elite who prospered enormously; the emergence of a small but growing “modern” middle class; and those who toiled in factories and lived in poverty. The “Age of Invention” established a bond between science and business where there were those who invented and those who applied the scientific method to industrial production. The growth of large corporations brought about a new way of conducting business. The development of industrial centers resulted in significant demographic (demography – the study of human populations movement) population shifts. Americans moved from the rural farmlands and countryside to the bustling urban centers in search of jobs. Immigrants, largely from Eastern and Southern Europe, who were fleeing persecution and poverty flooded America’s shores. Urban areas were unable to keep up with the population boom and faced insurmountable problems of housing shortages, poverty, crime, and corruption. The supply of labor was plentiful and there were many who were in desperate need of work.

If we step back and look at some of the events and conditions of this period, we could list the following:

* the growth of modern laissez-faire capitalism based on economic principles of supply, demand, and price, and the law of competition
* the growth of the middle class and conspicuous wealth by a few industrial leaders
* the growth of industry and the modern corporation
* a "marriage" between the business and scientific communities in corporate America
* a nation united by improvements in communication and transportation
* a shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy
* surge of millions of immigrants primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe
* the growth of the labor movement and strikes over working conditions, wages and child labor
* the growth of cities, poverty, crime, diseases, and other maladies (problems) affecting urban areas.

*Now you are ready to prepare for a debate.*

**CLASSROOM DEBATE**

**Debate Topic**

Debate continues among historians about the role of industrialists and entrepreneurs during the Industrial Revolution and the impact they had in the shaping of modern America.

**Question**

Were the industrialists and entrepreneurs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries “Robber Barons” or “Captains of Industry?”

**Debate Statements & Positions**

**Statement # 1:**

1. Industrialists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were hard working, goal oriented, innovative, and clever businessmen who transformed American business and in turn contributed to the shaping of capitalism and modern America.

**Statement # 2:**

1. The rich and politically influential industrialists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were “Robber Barons” who were ambitious, ruthless, opportunistic, and greedy men who sought to build business empires by any means necessary on the backs of the working class.

**Debate Procedure**

1. The debate will take the form of timed individual and/or group presentations and responses (rebuttal: refutation, disproof) separated by timed group work periods.
2. Prior to the beginning of the class period, both teams are to position their desks facing each other at the front of the room. Each team is to write its team name, debate position, and debate position statement (on a white board or poster for display purpose). **Note that absolutely no changes may be made to the position statement(s) presented. You must argue the debate position statement(s) exactly as written!**
3. Team members may speak from their desks. Audiovisuals may be used at any time, including handouts, flipcharts, uploaded, projected material, etc.
4. While the team is not required to use all of the time allocated to each debate component, speakers must stop immediately when the allocated time runs out.
5. Team members are prohibited from speaking to the audience or opposing team except at times specifically allocated to them. Therefore, there can be no immediate, reciprocal (mutual, joint, shared) interchange of comments between the teams.
6. The sequence of final closing arguments (position summaries) will be determined by a random procedure at the conclusion of the final work period. **Note** that no new information may be introduced during the closing arguments

**Audience Participation**

1. Class members in the audience will vote by secret ballot for a debate winner. **Votes are to be based upon presentation quality only** and not upon personal agreement or disagreement with the position espoused (adopted, advocated).
2. At the conclusion of each component of the debate, class members will be asked to assign a point rating along with explanatory comments to each team for their performance during that component. When the debate is over, the point ratings will be summed.

**Instructor’s Evaluation**

The instructor will also evaluate both teams according to the above procedures and criteria, and select his/her choice.

**DEBATE INSTRUCTIONS & PARTICIPANTS’ ROLES**

After several weeks of identifying, accumulating, and analyzing historical information from the readings, handouts, documents, and from your textbook, you are now ready to engage in the culminating activity, a debate.

The objective of this debate is to teach you how to handle conflicting historical evidence the way a detective does when solving a mystery. As with the facts in an unsolved crime, the facts of history are open to various interpretations. History is not a single narrative. It is an ongoing dialogue that sometimes generates heated debates. The excitement of history is in this dialogue and the sharp debates that keep it going.

The last activity in this series before students debate are two essays. You will need time to read each of the essays: Essay 1: “The Gilded Age; Age of the Robber Baron,” and Essay 2: “The Gilded Age: Birth of an Industrial Commonwealth.”

**Instructions**

Students will find the instructions located on the inside of their *“Student Guide – Debating the Documents – The Gilded Age – Age of the Robber Baron or Birth of an Industrial Commonwealth?”*

The debate will involve two groups of Defenders and one Questioner. Below are the two descriptions of the roles the students and the instructor will play.

**Defenders**

The task of each Defender Group is to defend one of the two essays. Each Defender must first read the appropriate essay and review the *Debating the Documents* primary sources referred to in that essay. Defenders should then put aside their own opinions and work together to plan a defense of the essay. They will make their case in a debate in the classroom.

**Questioner**

The Questioner will preview the outline the students have developed and prepared. The Questioner will develop a list of tough questions to ask each Defender group. The Questioner should look for errors of fact or for arguments that do not seem logical or fair. The Questioner’s task is to challenge both Defender groups, politely, yet firmly.

During the debate, the Questioner will help them refine and improve their case. For example, the Questioner should encourage the Defenders to clarify points that are unclear or urge them to listen to the other side’s arguments more carefully and respond to them more directly.

**The Debate Rules**

1. **Each Defender Group Meets.**

You will use these two essays as your blueprint for developing the debate. First Defenders prepare a page of notes on the essay and incorporate the “outside” historical information that you have collected over the past weeks. Your group will select several group members to prepare an outline of the case you will make in the debate. Tasks for presenting the case should be divided among your group members. For example, each Defender could defend one major point in the essay and discuss the sources on which that point is based.

1. **Questioner Meets with Each Defender Group.**

Each Defender group will give the Questioner an outline and briefly summarize its overall case. The Questioner will not challenge the Defenders in any way yet. The Questioner should only ask for clarification in order to understand each case fully.

1. **The Questioner Develops the Questions.**

The Questioner will brainstorm key questions to ask each Defender group during the debate.

1. **Hold the Debate.**

Below are the time estimates for a debate held during one ordinary class period.

* Before the entire class, each group of Defenders makes its case. (7 minutes per side)
* The Questioner directs challenging questions to each Defender group. (15 minutes)
* Each group of Defenders will be permitted 10 minutes to reflect and prepare their rebuttal on points addressed by the opposing Defender Group. (A rebuttal is a refutation, denial, negation, contradiction) to what has been said.
* Rebuttal (7 minutes)
* Closing Arguments (5 minutes)

1. **Additional Suggestions**
2. Treat every viewpoint with respect. Do not assume that all “right thinking” people think as you do.
3. Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the two sides of Defenders.
4. If you challenge a view, be sure you understand it and are not criticizing a simplified “straw man” ( a front for somebody, unimportant issue or person) version of it.
5. LISTEN closely! Especially to challenges to YOUR views. Try to hear and respond to these challenges in order to sharpen your own thinking.

**ESSAY ANALYSIS CHECKLIST**

***The Gilded Age: Age of the Robber Baron***

***The Gilded Age: Birth of an Industrial Commonwealth***

**Use this checklist to take notes on the two essays in this guide.**

As you read each essay, take a few notes on the topics listed below. Use these when preparing for your role in the debate on these two opposing views about the Gilded Age. (Use other sheets of paper as needed.)

* State the essay’s thesis. That is, state its main idea as presented in the first few paragraphs.
* What key statements of fact best help back up the essay’s thesis or main idea?
* Do any statements of fact seem false or unlikely to be accurate? List them.
* Which statements are most biased? That is, which are one-sided opinions not based on facts or clear reasons? List some.
* How well are the primary sources used? Which sources are used to most clearly back up the thesis?
* Is the logic of the argument clear? Why or why not?
* Overall, how strong a case does this essay make? Why?